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Dec 8 1720



Dr. *WILCOCK'S*
FAST-SERMON

Preach'd before the **HONOURABLE**

House of Commons:

On *Friday, December the 16th. 1720.*



Sabati 17^o die Decemb. 1720.

Ordered,

THAT the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Dr. Wilcocks, for the Sermon Preach'd before this House Yesterday, at St. Margarets Westminster, And that he be desired to Print the same ; And that Mr. Comptroller, Mr. Edgcumbe, and Sir Thomas D'Ath do acquaint him therewith.

Paul Jodrell,
Cl' Dom' Com'

The Increase of RIGHTEOUSNESS *the best Pre-*
servative against NATIONAL JUDGEMENTS.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the HONOURABLE
House of Commons,

A T
St. Margaret's Westminster,

On Friday, Decemb. the 16th. 1720.

B E I N G

The Day appointed by His MAJESTY
for a General FAST and HUMILIATION for ob-
taining Pardon of Our Sins and averting GOD's
Judgments; and particularly for beseeching GOD to
prelerve Us from the PLAGUE with which several
other Countries are at this time Visited.

By JOSEPH WILCOCKS, D. D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

L O N D O N,

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THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED
THAT THE PETITION OF THE

SEAFARERS

RELATIVE TO THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS

IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED
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GENESIS xviii. 32.

And he said, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once : Peradventure Ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for Tens sake.



THESE Words are the Conclusion of *Abraham's* Exposition with GOD concerning the intended Destruction of a notoriously wicked People. That the Cry of *Sodom* and

and Gomorrah had been great and their Sin very grievous was not at all disputed by *Abraham*, But wilt thou also, says he, destroy the Righteous with the Wicked? that be far from Thee; to do after this manner, to slay the Righteous with Wicked and that the Righteous should be as the Wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?

IN answer to which, without determining the Question in general, GOD tells him, That if there were in *Sodom* any considerable Number of Righteous Men He would spare all the Place for their Sakes. From Fifty, therefore, which was the Number first mention'd, *Abraham* goes on supposing still fewer and fewer till he came to Ten, and receiving the same gracious Answer to that Question, as he had done to the foregoing, he solicited no further, but return'd unto his own Place; concluding either that there was that number of Righteous there, and

and that the City would be spar'd, or that if there was not, it would be unreasonable to ask it.

THE Occasion of the Words being thus related, the Application of them will be but too easy to the Business we are here met about. That the Iniquities of our sinful Land are grievous, is what we want no Proof of; that the Vengeance of GOD, is hovering over us we very justly apprehend; and the Number of the Righteous in these large and populous Kingdom is, we fear, exceeding small in Proportion to the Multitude of Sinners. From *Abraham's* Reasoning therefore with GOD, and the issue of it in the Case of *Sodom*, I shall for our present Instruction, deduce these following Observations, *viz.*

I. THAT tho' it would, strictly speaking, be no Breach of Equity, if in sending *National* Judgments

ments and Evils, barely Temporal; G O D should sometimes destroy the Righteous with the Wicked; yet the Measures of his Providence in taking Vengeance, are, for the most part, temper'd with so much Mercy, as to incline Him to spare Multitudes of Sinners for the Sake of a few Righteous.

AND II. Of what Consequence therefore even a few good Men are in the World, and what an Advantage Men of true Religion are to any Society or Nation.

THE Dispensations of Providence in Regard to Temporal Judgments, seem to be under the Direction of great Wisdom; for should G O D take no Vengeance at all here, it might be question'd, Whether he took notice of Mens Wickedness, whether he had Holiness enough to dislike, or Power
to

to chastise it; and on the other Hand, should he always let loose his Wrath, where it is deserv'd, Men might be tempted to argue, that there is no other Life but this, nor any Occasion for a future Tryal.

To guard therefore against the Cavils of those who would insinuate, That there is no GOD, or no Providence, the ALMIGHTY sometimes makes bare his Arm, and sends down upon the Unrighteous visible and awakening Judgments. And yet withall to shew the Expediency of a future State, and of Retributions to come, he permits others to go unpunish'd here and to be carry'd to the Grave in Peace, and without any visible Judgments overtaking them. And when it seems requisite to GOD to punish a sinful Nation by sending Sword, or Pestilence, or any other Instruments of his Wrath, good and bad Men must be liable, as to all outward Circumstances, to share alike in the Calamity. If, for

Instance, They are invaded by a conquering Enemy, the Condition of Slavery becomes Universal; if Famine be to rage in the Land, the Necessities of good Men being the same with those of bad, Scarcity and Hunger, will distress and famish both alike; if the Pestilence be to diffuse itself, all that breath the same Air, feed on the same Diet, and have like Constitutions will be equally subject to fall before it.

IT is true, indeed, that God might by a miraculous Interposal make a Difference, and so perhaps he often does without our discerning it; but there is no Occasion for his doing so to vindicate his Justice; temporal Prosperity being matter of mere Favour from Providence, and what good Men can claim no Right to; For the Blessings which Religion promises, are of a Spiritual Nature, its Treasures are invisible, and the Kingdom which it speaks of, and the Crown it offers are such as Flesh and Blood cannot inherit.

Nay,

Nay, were temporal Evils to be always look'd upon as a sure Mark of God's Displeasure, yet even upon this Supposition the Divine Providence might involve good Men in National Judgements without the Charge of Injustice; because tho' some Men are better than others, yet the very best deserve Correction and Punishment at God's Hands.

To argue therefore in any Calamity befalling a great many at once, That there were no righteous Men amongst them, or that if there were, God's Providence must be blind, and his Way unequal, is inconclusive Reasoning, and to assert it from the Text is false Doctrine; for we find no Decision given to the Question in general, Whether to destroy the Righteous with the Wicked, were inconsistent with the Divine Justice; it being only said, That in that particular Case, and upon *Abraham's* Intercession, had *Sodom* had Ten good Men in

it G O D would have spared it ; not that he was oblig'd to do so in Justice, but inclined in Mercy.

A N D indeed , the Measures of G O D's Providence in taking Vengeance, are, for the most part, temper'd with so much Mercy, as to incline Him to spare Multitudes of Sinners, for the sake of a few Righteous. When the *Israelites* had offended G O D to such a degree by worshipping the molten Calf that his Wrath wax'd hot, and He was ready to consume them, for *Moses's* Sake he with-held his Hand, and repented of the Evil which he thought to do unto them. In like manner *Potiphar's* House, and *Pharaoh's* Kingdom prosper'd on account of *Joseph*, and a Blessing was brought upon the Arms of *Saul* for *David's* Services. And it was by Reason of the Land's Trespasing very grievously, that the Word the L O R D declar'd by *Ezekiel*, That when Famine, noisome Beasts, Sword, or Pesticence,

Pestilence, or any other Instrument of
G O D's Fury should be sent against
it, Tho' Noah, Daniel and Job were Ezek. xiv.
in it they should deliver but their own
Souls by their Righteousness. Which
Declaration as it shew'd that particu-
lar Sentence to be irreversibile, so it
was an imply'd Concession, that in
all ordinary Cases it was otherwise;
and that generally speaking such good
Men did turn away the Divine Wrath
from a wicked Land, and preserve others
by their Righteousness.

O F what Consequence therefore,
may we justly inferr, that even a few
good Men are in the World, and
what an Advantage Men of true Re-
ligion are to any Society or Nati-
on?

I N the Estimations of worldly Wis-
dom, Men are apt to argue the
Happiness of a People, from their Num-
bers, Riches, Power, Skill or Industry,
but one who considers the true Springs
of

of G O D's Providence would Reason at another Rate, and conclude, upon surer Grounds, That the Glory of a Land is its Religion, and its Happiness to be judg'd of by the Number of holy and upright Men who serve God in it. For tho' the Circumstances of such put them in no Capacity of Publick Service, they have an Interest with Him, who *ruleth over all, and is higher than the highest.*

I N this Sense therefore, and in its Influence the speculative and retir'd Life, may be the most active; the Devotion of some in their Closets, may give a Providential Turn to the Debates and Resolutions of others in Council; *by this, even, Kings may reign, and Princes decree Justice,* the Happiness of Nations may be secur'd or increas'd, their secret Enemies be disappointed, and their avow'd ones flee before them.

A N D this Reflection may greatly help to ease the Minds of good Men,
and

and to humble and confound bad ones; the former may satisfy themselves that in any Condition of Life, while they are dutiful to G O D, they may, tho' unknown to themselves, be Publick Benefactors ; and the latter can ne'er be sure but that the pious Man whom they set at nought, and the Service of G O D, which they make a Mock at, may be the true and only Cause of all their Prosperity.

A N D if the Case be thus, can the Wisdom of a Nation be better shewn or more usefully employ'd than in promoting the Fear of G O D, and the influence of Religion? Can our earthly Rulers more effectually consult even the Temporal Happiness of their Subjects, or be *the Ministers of God to them* for a greater Good, than the obtaining Blessings for their Dominions and themselves, by making use of all the proper Methods of *turning many unto Righteousness*. To preserve Peace on Earth is indeed the End of their Institution, and
the

the Business of their Office, but the Character they bear, and the Dignity they are invested in, does but increase their Obligation to countenance God's Publick Worship by an exemplary Piety. As they are the Substitutes and Vicegerents of God, and ordain'd of Him, as their Rank and Station in this World is allotted them by His Providence, the Distribution of all their Rewards and Punishments, and every Act of their Authority may lawfully, and with Honour, be directed to the setting forth of His Glory.

BUT while we thus account for the Methods of Providence here on Earth, we must beware of carrying this Argument further than it will hold, by supposing, that the same Face of Affairs is to continue when this World is at an end. For it is only here that the Sins of the Wicked can involve the Righteous in Calamities ; or that the Piety of a few holy Men can screen a Multitude of Sinners : Circumstances
hereafter

hereafter will be quite otherwise, when there comes to be no Distinction of Nations or Societies; when all Civil and Political Relation is at an end, and the Kindreds and Languages of the Earth are dissolv'd into a State of Independency. Every Breast will then be taken up with a separate Interest, each Offender will stand single, be try'd alone, and receive a personal Sentence.

THE Wheat and the Tares which took Root in the same Soil, which sprang up and grew together by the same Showers, and the same Sun's Influence, will, at the Harvest of the World, have a final Separation. The Sheep and the Goats which fed together, and equally enjoy'd the Shepherd's Care here, will then be put asunder, and the one set on the Right-hand for Honour, and the other on the Left for Dishonour. Even *Abraham*, *Sodom's* Advocate in the Text, will then Reason in a different Strain, and urge, as

he did in the Case of the Rich Man and *Lazarus*, That between the Blessed and the Miserable there is a wide Gulf fix'd, which neither the one nor the other can pass over; that they are never again to share Happiness or Calamities in common, but must remain excluded from all Intercourse by an eternal Separation.

HAVING thus observ'd how GOD's Providence might deal with Cities and Nations in Justice, how He commonly does deal by them in Mercy, and of what Consequence a few good Men are in the World; a due Reflection thereupon, will furnish our Minds with a ready Explication of some Occurrences in the Course of GOD's Providence, which are apt to perplex and discourage good Men, and to make Sinners grow daring. Does GOD tell *Abraham*, that for the Sake of Ten Righteous he would overlook the Provocations of a populous City, would let it still flourish and enjoy the Comfort of his Blessings,

sings, tho' the Cry of their Iniquity was great and their Sin grievous; how applicable an Instruction is this to the Governors of this World, not to be discourag'd from the Exercise of a Publick Spirit, for want of a Publick Acknowledgment; but to bear, like Providence, with the Murmurs and Ingratitude of the Major Part, and be contented to conferr Benefits at large, and to throw away gracious Offices upon many undeserving Men, for the Sake of their lighting upon some good Ones?

Do we see Cities and Nations abandon'd to all Vice, and polluted with every Sin of *Sodom*, and yet no Vengeance from above, no Fire from Heaven pour'd down upon them, and may we not conclude that they are spared at the secret Intercession of some *Abraham*, and for the Sake of a few Righteous? Do Sinners prosper in the World, have they Riches in Possession, do neither their Deceit nor Injustice

root them out of the Earth nor blast their Credit? And may it not be argued that, They are permitted to thrive, by the Blessing and for the Benefit of a Relation or Dependent; for some good Man's Sake who relies upon and subsists by them, must be a Sharer in their Misfortunes, and be crush'd in their Ruins?

I N the Method of G O D's Government of the World, the Point in View, is always to consult the Welfare and Benefit of the whole; to let loose or restrain his Vengeance not with Respect to the Offenders themselves, nor in Proportion to their Crimes; but as immediate Judgment, or Forbearance, will best answer the Purposes of his general Design, as all Things considered, and in the Main, the Interest and good Government of the World may make it requisite. Happy were it could our earthly Rulers copy after that unerring Wisdom; could the Resentments of passionate Man be calmly regulated
by

by a like Conduct, and his Justice and Judgment so executed, after the Example of Providence, as to terminate always in the common Benefit.

W H A T E V E R our National Deserts have been, our Publick Affairs have for many Years been so prosperous, that from the beginning of the present Reign to this Time, all our extraordinary Occasions of addressing ourselves to G O D have been for Praise and Thansgiving. The Honour of the *British* Throne has scarce ever been at an higher Pitch of Glory for succouring distress'd Nations, and restraining unjust Powers from invading the Rights of others, and disturbing the Repose of *Christendom*. The Ballance of *Europe*, by an able Administration still hangs upon the *British* Sceptre, and its Auxiliary Fleets continue to give Law from the Frozen to the Torrid *Zone*, and even as far as the Seas themselves are spread upon the Globe. And while we are celebrated Abroad as the Guar-

dians

dians of injured Nations, the Scourge and Terror of Oppressors, we have the Happiness to be blest'd at Home with as full an Enjoyment, as we can wish for, of our Religion, Laws, and Liberties. And even in this our Day of Dejection, that which brings us together now to prostrate ourselves and deprecate the Wrath of GOD in Christian Sackcloth and Ashes, *i. e.* with Weeping, Fasting and Praying, is rather the Apprehension of what our Neighbouring Nations suffer, than any Strokes of the Divine Vengeance we yet feel ourselves.

IT is true, that we are not without our Disappointments and Uneasinesses, the pleasing Hopes and too eager Desires of Gain have held us for a Time under strong Delusions; after flattering ourselves in a Golden Dream, that we were heaping up immense Treasures, and possessing ourselves of endless Wealth, we are dissatisfy'd, now we are awake again, that those
imaginary

imaginary Riches have not prov'd real Ones. But as among Private Persons the Way to judge of any one's Condition is to view it with that of other Men; so the Prosperity of Nations and Kingdoms will be best estimated by a Comparifon. And if we caft our Eyes over the feveral States of *Europe*, we fhall find that the Evils which we complain of are fuch only as the happieft of our Neighbours fhare in common with us; but if we take a View of others, what Scenes of Defolation by Fire and Sword may we behold in a *Northern*, and once flourishing Kingdom? What cruel Devaftations and Ravages has the *wild Boar out of the Foreft* been making with more than *Gothick* Barbarity?

IF we turn our Eyes *Southward*, where the deftroying Angel has been pouring out the *Vials of God's Wrath upon* *Thousands, and Ten Thousands*; where the *Peftilence* *ftill walketh in Darknefs*, and the *Sicknefs* *wafte*th at Noon-day, how
miferable

Isa. xxiii.
8.

miserable a Spectacle must that desolate Land afford, and that once joyous City, whose Merchants, as the Prophet says of Tyre, were Princes, and whose Traffickers were the Honourable of the Earth? And while Sword and Pestilence have afflicted these unhappy Quarters of Europe from the one Sea to the other, we have been alarm'd from the Center of it by Lamentations and Mourning and Wo. Our injur'd Brethren of the Reformed Religion being weary'd by Oppression, and finding the Yoke of their Bondage become insupportable, have so loudly Implor'd Succour of the Supreme Defender of the Faith, as to engage our Sovereign's Councils, His most powerful Interposals, and even his personal Appearance abroad, to animate the Protestant Powers in asserting their Rights and Priviledges, and withstanding the Encroachments of an Arbitrary and Persecuting Spirit.

FOR what Reasons we are thus distinguished by the Care of Providence,

dence, and have not shar'd in the Calamities which these unhappy Regions of *Europe* have been groaning under is to us a Secret: To look upon it as the Reward of our superior Holiness would be great Vanity; and to charge the suffering Nations with having been Sinners above all others would be uncharitable. It is most likely that by the Prayers, and for the sake of the Righteous within our Gates, the Scourge of G O D is with-held for a Season, and His Vengeance delayed only, and that *except we repent we shall all likewise perish.*

To avert which we can take no better Course than by a sincere and thorough Reformation, by endeavouring to become worthy of the continuance of that indulgent Providence which has hitherto watch'd over us. To which End, Profaness and Infidelity, should be every where discountenanced, the Honour and Service of G O D be duly regarded, and all possible increase be made of the Number of the

D

Righteous,

Psalm xci.

Righteous, that we may have Advocates in the Day of Distress to stand, like *Moses* and *Phineas* in the Gap, and so stay the Destroying Angel, that tho' a Thousand fall besides us, and Tenthousand at our Right Hand; there may no Evil happen unto us, neither any PLAGUE come nigh our Dwelling.

WHATEVER Political or Religious Differences have, on other Occasions, hinder'd the offering our joint Petitions in the House of GOD as Friends, there can be no Exceptions made to the Penitential Exercises we are now employ'd in, nor any Disaffection to cool the Fervency of our Prayers. *Ephraim* and *Manasseh*, as well as *Judah*, the Stranger within our Gates, they who favour not our *Sion*, nor the Peace of our *Jerusalem*, are however equally interested in these Sacrifices.

WHILE we have hanging over our Heads that dreadful Reconciler, and most formidable of all the Stores of
Divine

Divine Vengeance, our Contention and Enmity should cease on Earth; we should concurr, at least, as we may consistently, with differing Opinions, in reforming the Errors of our Lives and clothing ourselves with Innocence, Integrity, and Virtue. So shall we disengage ourselves from the vile and mischievous Suggestions of Envy, Prejudice, and Ill-nature; and from Avarice that fatal Root of the Evil we so heavily complain of, and of another Calamity, which we would as industriously conceal, and which equally ought to be lamented, our corrupt and mercenary Practices.

WE can use no Words that will better express our true Case than those of the Prophet to the Jews; *Behold, the Lords Hand is not shortned, that it cannot* Isaiah lix.
save; neither his Ear heavy that it cannot 1, 2, 3, 12.
hear. But our Iniquities have separated between us and our God, and our Sins have hid his Face from us, that he will not hear. For our Lips have

*spoken Lies, and our Tongue hath mut-
tered Perverseness. Our Transgressions
are multiplied before God, and our
Sins testify against us: for our Trans-
gressions are with us; and as for our
Iniquities we know them.*

*Isa. lv.
6, 7.*

AND if we find this to be our Di-
stemper, the same inspired Person will
direct us to the Remedy. *Seek ye, says he,
the Lord, while he may be found, call ye
upon him while he is near. Let the
Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous
Man his Thoughts: and let him return un-
to the Lord, and He will have Mercy
upon him, and to our God, for he will
abundantly pardon.*

THAT we may therefore become
truly sensible of our great Danger, and
use these proper Means for our Pre-
servation, and that our Endeavours
may be crown'd with Success,

GOD of his Infinite Mercy grant, for the
Sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

F I N I S.